

A Christmas Carol
by
Charles Dickens

Adapted for the stage by
Piers Beckley

A Christmas Carol was first performed at
the Lion and Unicorn Theatre, London,
on 9 December 2008 with the following
cast:

SCROOGE	Edward Kingham
BOB CRATCHIT	Joe Shefer
FRED	John Hellman
YOUNG SCROOGE	Mark Gillham
MRS CRATCHIT	Denys Gaskill
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST	Funmi Pearce
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT	Amy Puglia
SQUAB	Antonia Oliver
BELLE	Jade-Elize Lorentz
CHARWOMAN	Janine Robins
JANE	Zoshia Novick
TOPPER	Dan Richardson
YOUNG CRATCHITS	Davina Freedman Samantha Hannah
PETER CRATCHIT	Ross Mitchell
CAROLINE	Stacey Bland
LILLIE	Rebecca Hood
TINY TIM	Barbara Lanik
FAN	Lulu Fish Miles Brown

All other parts were played by the cast.

Directed by Ray Shell

This play may not be acted by professionals or amateurs without
written consent. For performance or other inquiries, please
contact piers.beckley@fatpigeons.com

ACT I

A large, empty space. Silent. Dark. Cold. Two desks, at one of which sits A BOY IN HIS TEENS, reading a book.

Other than he, the hall is empty.

In the distance, outside, a mournful, lonely carol echoes.

The boy ignores the carol and tends to his books.

LIGHTS SLOWLY DOWN

But the carol continues in the darkness through until...

LIGHTS UP

Scrooge's office. Two desks in the same position. At the desk the boy occupied, in the same posture, sits EBENEZER SCROOGE.

Scrooge gets up from his desk and storms past the other to the front door, which he slams open in order to scream at the terrified caroller.

SCROOGE

Stop that infernal wailing! And get out of my sight!

And slams the door closed again, on silence.

Scrooge paces, glaring balefully at the empty second desk as a church clock chimes the quarters... Then tolls the hour of two.

SCROOGE

Ha!

BOB CRATCHIT, Scrooge's clerk, runs in.

SCROOGE

Hallo! And is it not gone two already? Did my ears deceive me, or are you late?

BOB CRATCHIT

Yes sir. I mean, no sir. And yes sir.

SCROOGE

You have copied the debts and added the interest before you left, no doubt? For trade won't stop for the season, though the common man may slacken.

BOB CRATCHIT

Yes sir, everything is in order. I balanced the ledger this morning.

SCROOGE

Hm! Then I am obviously not utilising you to the fullest extent! I shall remedy that post-haste. I wish you to write a letter to each of our debtors, reminding them of the terms of our trade. If any are overdue, bring the accounts to me. And mind you re-use the blotting paper.

BOB CRATCHIT

Thank you sir.

SCROOGE

You must 'ware yourself, Mister Cratchit! You have been past your time on five occurrences already this past month. I shall not tolerate it for long. Missed work costs our business time and money, and I assure you that we have an abundance of neither!

BOB CRATCHIT

Yes sir, I shall start immediately.

SCROOGE

Is it not enough that I keep the roof over your head in the day, and at night too I must suppose? Get back to your work. Scriven, scriven! Enough that I have to pay you the day after tomorrow for not a lick of honest labour, that you take so long returning from these trips. Go on then!

A knocking without as Scrooge exits to his own room.

SCROOGE

Well, see to it! Must I lift the burden of this entire business upon my own shoulders?

Enter FRED, a hearty man.

FRED

How do you do Mister Cratchit.

BOB CRATCHIT

How do you do Mister Scrooge.

FRED

A mighty cold day it is today.

BOB CRATCHIT

That it is, sir, that it is. There's chills in the air all around.

FRED

And yet such a small fire to warm yourself at?

BOB CRATCHIT

Oh, the one in your uncle's room isn't much bigger, sir. And there's the candle for warmth too. And if it gets too cold for both of those, well I just put on another layer or two against the cold. Or three. Sometimes four, if it's particularly chilly.

FRED

As we speak of my uncle: is he in?

BOB CRATCHIT

Indeed, sir, in his usual place.

FRED

Capital, capital! Well I shall go through and surprise him then.

BOB CRATCHIT

Perhaps you should just...

But Fred's already into Scrooge's half of the office with

FRED

A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

BOB CRATCHIT

...wait a minute or two for him to calm down.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

FRED

Christmas a humbug? Come come, you don't mean that, I'm sure.

SCROOGE

I do. Merry Christmas, indeed! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough!

FRED

Come then, what right have you to be dismal, uncle? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough!

SCROOGE

And all earned fair-and-square by hard work and honest toil! Christmas? Bah! Humbug I say!

FRED

Don't be cross, uncle.

SCROOGE

What else can I be, when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas? Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time but a time for paying bills without money;

a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer, a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? Bah! If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with Merry Christmas on his lips should be boiled alive with his own pudding, and then buried with a stake of holly through his heart to keep him down. He should!

FRED

Uncle, have a heart.

SCROOGE

Nephew, you may keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

FRED

Keep it? But you don't keep it!

SCROOGE

Let it leave me alone then! Much good it has ever done for you.

FRED

I dare say that there are many things from which I have not profited but that I have derived good, Christmas among them. But I am sure that I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come around, as a good time. A kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.

SCROOGE

A time of trudging through snow and ice. A time of noise and tunelessness. And a time of unwanted invitations!

FRED

The only time which I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women all seem to open their shut-up hearts freely, and think of those below them as if they were truly fellow-passengers to the grave and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good in years to come, and I say: God bless it!

Bob breaks into a small round of applause at this. On receiving Scrooge's glare, he falls silent and attempts to absent himself from that dread gaze by poking the small fire. It goes out.

SCROOGE

Let me hear another sound from you, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your employment. You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into parliament. Or worse, journalism.

FRED

Oh uncle, don't be angry. Come, dine with us tomorrow! We have plenty of space at table, and we rarely see each other.

SCROOGE

I shall see you, oh yes I shall see you. I shall see you in hell before I dine with you at Christmas!

FRED

Why, uncle? Why?

SCROOGE

And why did you get married?

FRED

Because I fell in love!

SCROOGE

Because you fell in love! As if that is any answer. It has cost the two of you in money, and time, and effort, and you should have had the same without spending so much if you had not married! A waste for all concerned. Good afternoon!

FRED

Nay uncle, you never came to see me before I was wed. Why give that as a reason now?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

I ask nothing from you; I want nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

I am sorry with all my heart to find you so resolute. We never had any quarrel to which I have been aware. But I have made the trial in honour of Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So / a merry Christmas to you uncle. And a happy New Year!

SCROOGE

(from / above)

Good afternoon! Good afternoon! Good afternoon!

Fred leaves the inner office.

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

FRED

And a merry Christmas to you too. And how are your good wife and family?

BOB CRATCHIT

They do well, sir. I shall say you asked after them, and thank you. Merry Christmas, and a happy New Year. May everything go well for you.

As Fred takes his leave, a portly gentleman, Mr SQUAB enters.

SQUAB

Ah, hello, yes. Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?

SCROOGE

Can you not prevent these people crossing the threshold, Cratchit?

BOB CRATCHIT

I'm sorry, sir, but he came in when the door was open.

SQUAB

Indeed, indeed I did.

SCROOGE

Do we have business? If so, then come in and speak it plain, for I am, as you can see, a busy man, and running more behind all the time.

SQUAB

Do I have the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge, or Mr Marley?

SCROOGE

Mr Marley has been dead these seven years now, so your business with him had best be grave. I am the representative of Scrooge and Marley on this earth, so state your business and be done with it.

SQUAB

Indeed. Well, Mister Scrooge, in this festive season of the year, our thoughts often turn to thanks for what's ours and our families. But there are many who are poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of necessities. Hundreds of thousands are in want of simple comforts. At this time of year, then, my friends and I believe it even more desirable than usual that we should make some slight provision for those in need.

SCROOGE

Are there no prisons? For I was under the impression that we had built many these past few years.

SQUAB

Why, plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE

And the Union workhouses? They still support the poor of each parish, do they not? Offering nourishment for body and soul, an they be prepared for hard work in exchange for it?

SQUAB

Indeed the workhouses are still in operation, although I wish I could say they were not.

SCROOGE

Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that some cataclysm might have befallen them. A veritable Armageddon to stop them in their useful course. I am exceedingly glad to hear that no such thing has occurred.

SQUAB

Sir, we believe that neither prison nor the workhouse furnish true Christian cheer or charity to those within, or to the multitude without. And so a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat, and drink, and means of warmth.

SCROOGE

Why now, eh? They're with us all year round. Can you not assist 'em at other times of year, or is it only now when you start feeling guilty at your own good living?

SQUAB

We chose this time in particular to bring some respite and perhaps a little joy into their lives as it is a time, among all others, when want may be keenly felt, and abundance rejoice.

SCROOGE

Yes, yes, so you say, so you say.

SQUAB

Then what may I put you down for?

SCROOGE

Stay your horses for just one moment, while I consider the matter. Yes, put me down as: nothing.

SQUAB

Ah, you wish to remain anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, that is my answer. I do not make merry myself at Christmas, and I cannot afford to make the idle merry. My taxes help to support the establishments that I have mentioned, and they cost enough. The badly off must take their choices between them, else work for their money like the rest of us.

SQUAB

Many cannot go to the workhouse, Mr Scrooge. And many would rather die than face the skilful, backbreaking work, and separation from their loved ones.

SCROOGE

Well if they would rather die than live that is no fault of mine.

Rather they should do it right away, and decrease the surplus population. Without those who cannot and will not work, the lot and salary of the honest man shall increase!

SQUAB

You think them all worthless?

SCROOGE

I have no knowledge of these people.

SQUAB

But you might know them, should you wish.

SCROOGE

They are none of my business. In my opinion it is enough for a man to understand his own business, and that is difficulty enough for most, and not to interfere with others. My own business occupies me constantly. Good afternoon!

SQUAB

Very well. Good day to you sir.

Squab puts on his hat and leaves.

Scrooge and Bob Cratchit settle down at their respective desks and scratch with their quills as the lighting changes from afternoon, through dusk, and into night.

The scene changes to the Cratchits' living room. MRS CRATCHIT stirs a pot.

PETER CRATCHIT comes in, with a brown paper parcel.

PETER

Here it is, mother. All returned from uncle.

MRS CRATCHIT

Oh, hang it up by the fire that it may rest. I shall iron it later, so that your father may have it ready for Christmas.

Peter gets out a shirt and hangs it by the fire as two younger Cratchits come racing through, a YOUNG BOY holding a sampler just out of the reach of a YOUNG GIRL.

YOUNG GIRL

Give it back! Give it back!

YOUNG BOY

Sha'n't!

YOUNG GIRL

I'll tell mama on you! Then she'll be angry!

And I will, so.

MRS CRATCHIT

And the two of them tear off around the kitchen again as Bob enters.

Papa!

YOUNG CRATCHITS

As he swiftly grabs the sampler from the boy, hands it to the girl and heads over to MRS CRATCHIT for a swift buss. The two children stick tongues out at each other.

MRS CRATCHIT

What word is there from the doctors?

BOB CRATCHIT

They could not help and did not know. Nothing. Something. But he's a strong lad, so they tell me.

MRS CRATCHIT

And don't we know it.

BOB CRATCHIT

And he submitted to the poking and ministrations with never a word of complaint. I don't know that I'm as brave.

MRS CRATCHIT

Here now. Supper's ready.

And as she dishes out a small slice of bread to everyone...

Scrooge walks home through the cold streets to his cold house, wind whispering behind him, greatcoat pulled tight, until he reaches the house and puts his key in the door.

MARLEY'S GHOST

(quiet as a whisper)

Scrooge...

He looks at the door, as if for a moment it had turned into something else... Then picks himself up and moves in.

The door slams behind him like a peal of thunder, and the echoes don't die out.

Scrooge fastens the door behind him.
All this done in SOUNDSCAPE as Scrooge
walks to his apartment and his
reactions...

- The wind seeming to rise, again, the
voice of Marley's ghost slightly louder
now in the background

MARLEY'S GHOST

Scrooge...

- The jingle of horses' harness

- The clatter of horses' hooves and
wheels on cobbles growing louder and
louder until

- The shadow of a hearse seems to
swoosh past Scrooge in the gloom of the
ill-lit hallway, leaving him crushed
tight against a wall to let it pass.

And silence. He moves to his apartment
and locks the door behind him.

And bolts it.

SCROOGE

Ha!

In the apartment: A bed, and a fire
which Scrooge lights. He changes for
bed, humming a little song to himself
as he does so.

Marley's face in the fire.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Scrooge...

SCROOGE

What's that!

But it's gone.

SCROOGE

Humbug!

A lonely bell tolls elsewhere in the
building. Ignored for a moment then

SCROOGE

Be quiet.

It's joined by another.

SCROOGE

Has no-one else anything to do but make noise!

Then another bell, and another, pealing out, then more, joining together, a deafening cacophony.

SCROOGE

Stop. Stop. Stop it!

Silence.

Then a clanking noise, deep below. Like a chain being dragged.

A door being slammed open.

Another clank. Closer now. Another. Closer.

SCROOGE

It's humbug. Humbug still! I won't believe it.

Marley's Ghost enters and the flames leap up, then die down. He wears a heavy steel chain around his waist, and a scarf binds his jaw.

SCROOGE

How now! What do you want with me?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Much.

SCROOGE

You bear the likeness of one I knew - who are you?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Ask me, rather, who I was.

SCROOGE

Who were you, then?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Do you not recognise your old partner?

SCROOGE

Can you - can you sit down?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I can.

SCROOGE

Then do it.

Marley's Ghost does so. Scrooge examines him from all sides.

SCROOGE

I must have fallen asleep. Yes, that's it. A long tiring day at work, and my old partner brought to mind this very day. Still, most vexing. I shall sit here until I wake up.

MARLEY'S GHOST

You do not believe in me.

SCROOGE

No, sir, I do not.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Yet you see me, and hear me. What evidence would convince you, if your own senses do not?

SCROOGE

I don't know. Nothing, I think, for you ain't real.

MARLEY'S GHOST

You doubt your senses.

SCROOGE

Ha, my senses? Why, a little thing affects 'em. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be nothing more than an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. Mark my words, there's more of gravy than the grave about you. Do you see this toothpick?

He holds a large toothpick up to the light.

SCROOGE

Solid and light. I have but to swallow this, and for the rest of my days be persecuted by a multitude of goblins, each of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you. Humbug!

The spectre removes its scarf - and its lower jaw drops open, a bloody mess.

SCROOGE

Mercy!

MARLEY'S GHOST

Now do you believe?

SCROOGE

I do. I must. But why should your spirit wander the earth - and why come to me?

MARLEY'S GHOST

It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk among his fellows, and travel far and wide. And if he should not travel in life, then he must do so after death. I must travel the world, and witness what I cannot share, but might have shared on earth. To see where I might have helped, what ills I could have turned to happiness!

SCROOGE

You are fettered. Tell me why.

MARLEY'S GHOST

I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard. I put it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. It is made from cashboxes, padlocks, and purses wrought in steel. Is its pattern strange to you?

SCROOGE

I have never seen one like it.

MARLEY'S GHOST

You have not looked. Would you know the weight and length of the coil you bear yourself? It was as heavy and as long as this seven Christmas Eves ago - and you have laboured on it since.

SCROOGE

Old Jacob, Jacob Marley. Old friend. Why appear to me now? Why tell me this? Have you no comfort for me?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I have no comfort for you, Ebenezer Scrooge. Comfort comes from other regions, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men.

SCROOGE

And you?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I must walk the places I did not go in life. My spirit never wandered outside our counting house, never beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole, and now I must travel afar to take the journeys that I never did in life. To observe the unhappiness and evil in the world, and yet be unable to alleviate them.

SCROOGE

But why this punishment, Jacob? What have you done to deserve this fate? You were always a good man of business.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business. Charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business! Hear me. My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE

I will, as we were friends. Pray tell me Jacob, what's to be done?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I am here to warn you that you may yet have a chance and a hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

You were always a good friend. Thank'ee!

MARLEY'S GHOST

You will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE

Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?

MARLEY'S GHOST

It is.

SCROOGE

I - I think I'd rather not. If it's all the same. I shall mend my ways, get out a bit more. Bracing air, that's the answer.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first tonight when the bell tolls one.

SCROOGE

Couldn't I take 'em all at once and get it over with?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Look to see me no more; and for your own sake, remember what has passed between us!

Marley's ghost rebinds its jaw to its face and steps towards the window.

The window raises itself, and the sound of the wind outside raises, peaks, falls away.

Beneath it, louder now, the sounds of voices. Wailings, incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret, growing louder and louder until... Marley's ghost joins them in a terrible shriek then disappears.

SCROOGE

Hum. Hm.

He looks around the room. Checks the clock.

SCROOGE

A dream? Or not? Well I am up now, and I shall stay up, like it or no.

Scrooge sits on his bed and waits until the clock begins to chime the hour. As the last chime rings out.

SCROOGE

Ha! The hour itself, and nothing else.

And then the toll of One, and suddenly, shockingly, THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST appears, shedding a bright light all around it.

SCROOGE

Are you the spirit, then, whose coming was foretold to me?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

I am.

SCROOGE

Who, and what are you?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE

Long past?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

No. Your past.

SCROOGE

You are quite bright. Can you cover yourself? Or diminish your illumination slightly?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

What! Would you so soon put out the light I give?

SCROOGE

No, no, of course not. But upon what business do you enter my bedchamber?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Your welfare.

SCROOGE

Well, sir, I'm much obliged to you, though I can't but think that a good night's rest would have been more conducive to that.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Very well then. Your redemption. Rise! And walk with me!

A Scrooge does so, the scene changes.

The boy sits at his desk again.

SCROOGE

Is that...

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

He is but a shadow of what was, of the things that have been. He has no consciousness of us. Do you know him? A lonely child, still at school on Christmas Eve...

SCROOGE

Poor boy. With nothing but his books to comfort him.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Do you recognise him?

SCROOGE

No more. I'll have none of his loneliness. Take us from here, spirit.

The lighting changes, though the young man remains reading his book.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Another time.

FAN, a teenage girl enters.

FAN

Dear brother! Dear, dear brother.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Fan? Fan! Why are you here?

FAN

I have come to bring you home!

YOUNG SCROOGE

Home?

FAN

Yes! Home for good! Father is so much kinder than he used to be.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Is it so?

FAN

So much that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home. And he said yes, you should! And we shall have Christmas together this year.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Then he has changed?

FAN

Yes! And there'll be no more squabbles, or raised voices. A true family again!

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Such a big heart, she had, and adored her elder brother,
though he was sent far away.

SCROOGE

She was so frail... But she is long dead now.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

She died a woman, though. And left a child behind.

SCROOGE

One child. My nephew.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Come!

A bench in town. Two people are
wrapped up warm and tight - Young
Scrooge, and BELLE.

SCROOGE

Must we see my youthful fancies? Those two are long gone.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Were they so bad?

SCROOGE

There's nothing to be done with 'em. So why not leave 'em
be? The past is past, so no use dwelling on it.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Belle, I swear, you are the most beautiful woman in all the
town.

SCROOGE

You see? Why there's hundreds like her in town - and I in
the country, knowing so little about what beauty was. Ha!

BELLE

Ah, away with you.

YOUNG SCROOGE

You are, and I shall tell you so again and again, until the
whole town shall hear of it!

BELLE

And what if they did? Would it be so bad?

YOUNG SCROOGE

No, it would not, not if I were with you forever.

SCROOGE

To be so young and foolish! All that time, wasted. Thrown
away, never to return.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Did you not care for her?

SCROOGE
A passing fancy.

YOUNG SCROOGE
Belle, I love you.

BELLE
And so you say!

YOUNG SCROOGE
Then... Belle... Will you marry me?

BELLE
Oh, Ebenezer... And where shall we live? And how shall we support ourselves? No, I'll with the needlework, and stay with my father, till we have the means to be together at last.

YOUNG SCROOGE
I am to be apprenticed! Mister Fezziwig needs a clerk, and I am to learn at his desk, and we may soon have our own place.

BELLE
You mean it? I pray you, do not ask if this is just a fancy. I could not bear it.

YOUNG SCROOGE
This is no fancy. I shall improve my fortune by patient industry, and so improve ours. Fezziwig is a good teacher, so they say, and generous with his words and encouragement. And then I shall come back for you, Belle. And we shall live together forever. Within five more turnings of the year. Please - say we shall be married?

BELLE
Yes. Yes!

He places a ring on her finger and they kiss.

SCROOGE
I have seen enough of a young man's foolish thoughts.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST
You would prefer to see what you call wisdom?

SCROOGE
Yes.

Young Scrooge is outside a large house.
Enter YOUNG MARLEY, out of breath.
Music comes from off stage, a fiddle, a lively dance.

YOUNG MARLEY
There you are! You should be inside, and you should see old Fezziwig!

Why he's dancing a storm with Mrs Fezziwig and the rest of the guests, and the two of them will not be trifled with.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I'll keep my own counsel tonight Jacob, Christmas or no.

YOUNG MARLEY

Are you still pining for that young lady from the country? I see you are! Then what's stopping you from stopping by? What say you bring her something special?

YOUNG SCROOGE

Jacob, I need save for the future, not spend it all now!

YOUNG MARLEY

The future? Oh, that'll take care of itself, why think about it when you don't need to? But there may be something I can help with. An opportunity for business has recently landed in my lap, if you wish to know more.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Ha! And you know we're not finished with our prenticeship.

YOUNG MARLEY

It'll not be long before old Fezziwig is done with us, and I have my eye on a property in London. An old warehouse, stuffed to the gills with barrels the owner cannot move, for he knows not what's in 'em! He'll get rid of the lot to be rid of the warehouse.

YOUNG SCROOGE

And what of it?

YOUNG MARLEY

Profit, my dear Ebenezer! Why the gentleman in question has already vouchsafed to me that he knows not half of what is in there, and just wants to be rid of the place. I tell you, were we to remove it from his hands, we should advantage ourselves indeed.

YOUNG SCROOGE

And what do you ask of me?

YOUNG MARLEY

A half of the money, for I can't afford it of my own. Come with me tomorrow and you shall see for yourself.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I'm to see Belle tomorrow.

YOUNG MARLEY

With what? Think of the money you'll be able to woo her with when we go through the warehouse! I was there just yesterday - there's tools, and sack-cloth, and tobacco, and bales of wool and cotton that once dried will go some way towards our profit.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Profit? From that?

YOUNG MARLEY

You'll profit by it especially when you return to your young lady friend. And the warehouse itself will make a fine base for a business. We'll work together and shall have both our names over the door: Marley and Scrooge.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Scrooge and Marley.

YOUNG MARLEY

Scrooge and Marley then! Your first deal! Come with me tomorrow and see the warehouse, and if it's not all I say it is then may it be Marley alone above the door.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Yet you can't do it without me. You may have the contacts for such a venture, but I have the funds that you need.

YOUNG MARLEY

Your wit is not unlike my own, your mind as sharp. I need your acumen as well as your cash. Scrooge and Marley, together! And then you shall woo your Belle, and I shall find one just like her!

And the music grinds to a halt, and Young Scrooge walks across the stage to Belle, on her bench again.

She's been crying.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Wipe away your tears, Belle. It makes me sad to see you cry like that.

BELLE

It matters little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.

YOUNG SCROOGE

What idol has displaced you?

BELLE

A golden one.

YOUNG SCROOGE

A golden one. You count this as the even-handed dealing of the world! Has the poverty that we have known not been bad enough? Though poverty be the hardest thing, yet the pursuit of wealth is condemned! And why should it be? With money, we can be safe from blows, and hunger, and trouble.

BELLE

Oh, Ebenezer. You fear the world so much. All your other hopes have merged into one, that of being beyond its grasp. Even as I've watched these years, I have seen all your nobler aspirations fall away, until only one remains - that of gain.

YOUNG SCROOGE

And if I am now wiser than I was, what then? I am not changed towards you. I am not. We can be together, and safe together, as I promised.

BELLE

Our contract is an old one. We made it when we were both poor, and content to be so until we could improve our worldly fortune by patient industry. But Ebenezer, you are changed. When our contract was made, you were another man.

YOUNG SCROOGE

I was a boy then.

BELLE

You were not then what you are. Yet I am. When we were one in heart, this moment promised so much happiness, and now is fraught with misery. But I can release you.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Have I ever sought release?

BELLE

In words? No. Never.

YOUNG SCROOGE

In what, then?

BELLE

In a changed nature; in an altered spirit. In everything that has made my love of worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us, would you seek me out and try to win me now?

YOUNG SCROOGE

You think not.

BELLE

I would so gladly think it if I could! But if you were free tomorrow, can even I believe you would choose a dowerless girl? I have no more than when we parted, and no less. No, if for a moment you were to choose that girl, your repentance and regret would soon follow. Ebenezer, I release you. And I do it with a full heart, for the love of him who you once were.

She returns his ring.

BELLE

It is possible, I suppose - the memory of what you once were makes me hope - that you will have some pain in this.

But it will be for a brief time. Soon you will forget that we ever loved one another, and think it merely an unprofitable dream. I hope that you are happy in the life you have chosen.

She leaves.

YOUNG SCROOGE

But we were to be married...

SCROOGE

Why do you delight to torture me? This cannot be changed! What's past is past!

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

So it is.

SCROOGE

Then why are you doing this? I can no more change that day than ascend to heaven. Jacob said that he had procured a chance and a hope for me, not a torture.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

The past is within each of us. We cannot change it. Yet we can learn from what it teaches.

SCROOGE

And what does it teach? That we cannot connect with one another? That all is dust at the end? I know these lessons!

Young Scrooge and a CLERGYMAN appear.

CLERGYMAN

If you could just sign here. Thank you. I am heartfelt sorry for your loss.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Yes, I am certain. And that will be all?

CLERGYMAN

A settling of the account.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Yes. Still, we must get on. I have my business to attend, as I'm sure you have yours. I must arrange the employment of a new clerk and dispose of Mister Marley's effects, so I have no time to tarry.

CLERGYMAN

I suppose you would not want them around to remind you.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Remind or not, it's all the same to me. But a gentleman was looking to outfit his office immediately, and willing to pay quite handsomely for it. It would be a shame to disappoint him, and there's plenty of business to take care of. It keeps me sharp and in a good humour, and there's little enough of that these days.

CLERGYMAN

Many of my parishioners seek to lose themselves in work after a loss.

YOUNG SCROOGE

And I have much to be doing with, so if you will excuse me.

A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN enters - we'll know him as EDWARD.

EDWARD

Good day to you sir.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Good day. Have we an acquaintance?

EDWARD

Your face is familiar... I feel perhaps that we might, but... I am not sure.

YOUNG SCROOGE

Then good day.

Exit Young Scrooge.

EDWARD

Good sir, pray, who was that? I fancied I knew him, or recognised him from somewhere, though I know not where.

CLERGYMAN

A fellow for a funeral. Scrooge, of Scrooge and Marley. The other is in the ground today.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

One shadow more!

SCROOGE

No more! No more! I don't wish to see it.

The ghost pinions him, and turns him to face:

Belle. Older now, as her husband enters. They kiss.

EDWARD

Hullo Belle. I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon, as I talked to the parson about our daughter's wedding to come.

BELLE

And who was that then?

EDWARD

Guess.

BELLE

Tut tut, like I can read your mind. Not Mister Scrooge, surely?

EDWARD

Mister Scrooge it was. I did not recognise him at first, for he was not in his office, but just returned from burying his partner. And on the walk home I passed his office window; it was not shut up and there was a candle inside so I could not help but see him. There he sat, alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe.

SCROOGE

Spirit! Remove me from this place.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

I told you these were shadows of things that have been. They are what they are. What they were made. By you.

SCROOGE

Remove me. I cannot bear it! I don't want to look! I don't want to see any more! Be gone!

The ghost disappears, and Scrooge is back in his bedroom again.

SCROOGE

My bedroom. Nothing more.

Then he notices the open window. And closes it.

Later in the morning, in Scrooge's office. Bob Cratchit is at his desk early as Scrooge enters in cheerful mood.

SCROOGE

Good morning, Bob. A fine day today!

BOB CRATCHIT

Good morning Mister Scrooge. Is everything all right?

SCROOGE

Why of course, good Bob, and why should it not be?

BOB CRATCHIT

No reason, sir. Not with it almost being Christmas for truth.

SCROOGE

Ah, yes. Christmas. Well, you must be cold, there's hardly a thing in your fire.

He goes to his own side of the room, takes a single piece of coal from the scuttle. Thinks about it, then takes another and adds them both to the fire.

SCROOGE

There! A roaring fire to keep you warm on such a cold day.

BOB CRATCHIT

Well. Thank you sir.

SCROOGE

Of course, Bob. Why being generous is no trouble at all. None at all, I say. The very heart of simplicity itself.

He moves into his own office.

Enter CAROLINE'S HUSBAND.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

Is Mister Scrooge in?

BOB CRATCHIT

It's so, but his mood is strange today. I can only guess he rested well last night. Or perhaps is ill, for he is certainly not himself.

Scrooge pops his head out the door.

SCROOGE

And why do you keep people awaiting, Mister Cratchit, when my door is open? Pray come through! So good to see you again. Are you well?

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

It has been a hard month, but we are surviving tolerably.

SCROOGE

Ah, good, good. I take it you have come to settle our account?

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

That is what I have come to see you about, sir. There has been a heavy snow, and the tracks are logged. I do not have the money to pay for the line of credit right now. I have come to throw myself on your mercy, sir, and beg for an extension.

SCROOGE

An extension! Why I... Tell me more.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

It would just be for a short while longer, for the markets are moving again and it would not take long to recover the money we are owed. Then we in turn may pass it on to you.

SCROOGE

I see. Well... Of course you must have your credit! For without credit what a situation we would be in, eh? We must get the markets moving once more.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

Thank you, sir! I never expected such kindness.

SCROOGE

It is nothing. A reflection of my new-found generosity. Still, I suppose there must be a small something to cover the loan. Let us put an extra - no, a half per cent on.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

I shall have the money and interest returned to you within a month.

SCROOGE

Very well! A deal! Let us shake on it, and then speak to my clerk to draw up the agreements! A fine day's work of a Christmas, to help you in your hour of need. Why, I feel warmer and lighter in my heart already! Much better and more confident indeed.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

Thank you, sir, thank you! You're a good man.

SCROOGE

That I am, now, that I am. Well, go on, off with you then!

The bells from the church chime, and Scrooge gets up from his desk and enters Bob Cratchit's room.

SCROOGE

A good day's work, I feel. You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose.

BOB CRATCHIT

If it's quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

It's not convenient, and it's not fair. What have you to say to that, eh? Ha. If I was to stop half-a-crown for your day off, you'd think yourself ill-used, no doubt. And yet you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work.

BOB CRATCHIT

It is only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE

A poor excuse indeed for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day then. Be sure you get here all the earlier on the twenty-sixth.

Lights down.

Scrooge returns home. This time, no Marley at the door, no hearse in the passage, no ghost in the bedroom.

SCROOGE

Ha.

He settles down to sleep, and blows his candle out.

There's the dimmest of glows on the bed. Rising slowly though, until Scrooge wakes. And the light continues to glow and grow until it's a spotlight shining down on Scrooge directly.

SCROOGE

An I suppose I must have two more, like it or no. Very well then.

Wide awake now, there appears THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT, large, jolly, and genial.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Well, then? Get up, man! Get up, and know me better! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present! Look upon me! You have never seen the like of me before!

SCROOGE

Never, that's true. I am certain that I would have recalled.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

And you have never walked abroad with the other members of my family in these latter years.

SCROOGE

There are others of you?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

My brothers and sisters, eighteen hundred and forty-three so far! The youngest you would have seen yourself, had you left this room in these seasons and taken yourself about.

Scrooge surreptitiously pinches himself.

SCROOGE

A tremendous family to provide for, no doubt. I'm afraid that I have not. I suppose you have come to talk with me here in the comfort of my own home beside a roaring fire?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

In this season, I must travel. And you shall travel with me, if you wish for redemption.

SCROOGE

Ha! I find myself in advance of you. Already I have changed. But still, I suppose we must complete this bargain. Come, my spiritual counsellor, conduct me where you will!

We are in a city street. The hawk and bustle of traders and market places.

TRADER

Spanish onions! Pears and apples! Grapes and raisins and cinnamon and figs, and chestnuts for cooking on the fire! Ah, here you go love. Candied fruit and French plums, Norfolk apples and Spanish oranges and whole baskets of chestnuts!

The ghost sprinkles a few droplets of water from a flask he carries over the trader's wares.

Church bells ring out, and people walk through the town carrying covered roasting tins. They form a queue in front of a bakers.

The ghost lifts the covers from each tin in turn, and sprinkles a few drops of water from his flask over the contents.

SCROOGE

Is there a particular flavour that you are adding to their dinner?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

There is. My own.

SCROOGE

And what should that be?

Two people join the end of the queue at almost the same time, bumping and jostling each other.

FIRST PERSON

Hey, watch where you're going!

SECOND PERSON

I was here for the oven first, what are you trying to do, push in? You've got no cause to do that.

FIRST PERSON

You almost spilled my goose, right on the pavement there. A fine Christmas that would've been.

SECOND PERSON

And what if I did? If you hadn't been dreaming your life away, what then?

The ghost sprinkles a few drops of water over the two of them. They've reached the front of the queue now, and hand over their dishes to the baker.

FIRST PERSON

Ah, but why are we quarrelling today of all days? It didn't spill and there's an end to it. Here you go, sir, for the oven.

SECOND PERSON

There's no harm done. Thank you, baker. Looks like we're the last, and still plenty of time for church.

FIRST PERSON

It would be a shame to quarrel on Christmas Day.

SECOND PERSON

So it would. God love us, so it would! Happy Christmas to you and yours - I'll see you here after, to pick 'em up and bear 'em home!

They exit as the baker shuts up and scurries off to church.

SCROOGE

And your flavour - is it for all dinners on this day? Or just for a lucky few?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

For any dinner kindly given, and any word kindly said. To a poor one the most.

SCROOGE

And why that?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Because it needs it most. Come.

And the two of them are in Bob Cratchit's house. Mrs Cratchit is there laying the table while Peter checks the potatoes bubbling away on the fire.

PETER

The potatoes are almost ready.

MRS CRATCHIT

And what has ever got your precious father and the others then?

PETER

Ah, they sha'n't be long, I'm sure.

The two younger Cratchits run through.

YOUNG GIRL

Mother, mother.

YOUNG BOY

There's such a goose, mother.

YOUNG GIRL

We smelled it outside the bakers.

YOUNG BOY

We know it's ours as it smells like heaven must.

YOUNG GIRL

Shush your mouth, who's to know how heaven smells?

YOUNG BOY

Well it must smell like goodness, mustn't it?

YOUNG GIRL

Then you certainly wouldn't know!

Enter Bob Cratchit, wearing his best shirt, and Tiny Tim. Tim has an iron frame on his legs, and supports himself with a crutch.

BOB CRATCHIT

Hullo mother. Look who I found in church then.

TINY TIM

Hello mother.

YOUNG BOY

Tim! Tim! You must see the pudding.

YOUNG GIRL

It's as big as a house. And it makes a noise like singing as it boils! Come, this way!

And they grab him and bustle him off.

MRS CRATCHIT

And how did little Tim behave?

BOB CRATCHIT

As good as gold, and better.

MRS CRATCHIT

Was he all right, with such a long service?

BOB CRATCHIT

He was better than fine. He's strong and hearty that one. Why I felt myself flagging at one point, and he pushed me awake!

The three younger members of the family return.

YOUNG GIRL
Is it time yet?

YOUNG BOY
Is it time?

MRS CRATCHIT
Oh, I'm not so sure... Perhaps. Yes, go on then.

YOUNG BOY
Come on Peter.

YOUNG GIRL
Come on, the goose, the goose!

PETER
Very well, here I come, ready or not!

And he chases the two of them out of
the room.

MRS CRATCHIT
Father tells me you were very good in church.

TINY TIM
It was so quiet and special. And I wanted to give thanks for
all we have.

MRS CRATCHIT
Now is that the truth of things.

TINY TIM
I thought it would be good to be there, that the people could
see me in church, a worshipping.

BOB CRATCHIT
Oh Tim, you do get these thoughts in your head. All this
sitting by yourself so much is what it is.

TINY TIM
I thought it might be pleasant for them to remember upon
Christmas Day who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

BOB CRATCHIT
And maybe it will at that. Hark, here's the goose!

The goose is brought in and paraded
around the table. As Bob says grace,
the Ghost of Christmas Present shakes a
few drops over it.

BOB CRATCHIT
O Lord, the merciful and good, bless and sanctify our food.
Grant that they may wholesome be, and make us thankful unto
thee. Amen.

OMNES

Amen.

They tuck in.

BOB CRATCHIT

I do believe this is the best goose that we have ever had.

MRS CRATCHIT

It's the stuffing mix, I do declare, my mother's before me.

PETER

What a size it is.

BOB CRATCHIT

And so tender. I don't believe there ever was such a goose cooked in any house in all of England that's as good as this one today.

MRS CRATCHIT

And so cheap, as well.

BOB CRATCHIT

Always a good thing, my dear! This is the greatest feast in all the world. Well, a merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!

TINY TIM

God bless us every one!

SCROOGE

Spirit - tell me, if you can. Will Tiny Tim live?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Already the disease crawls through his innards, turning his blood against him. I see a vacant seat in the corner; and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, the child will die.

SCROOGE

Can you not spare him?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

If these shadows remain unaltered, none other of my family will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, better to do it and decrease the surplus population.

BOB CRATCHIT

Mister Scrooge! I'll give you Mister Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!

MRS CRATCHIT

The Founder of the Feast indeed! I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it!

BOB CRATCHIT

My dear; the children. Christmas Day!

MRS CRATCHIT

It should be Christmas Day, I am sure, on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mister Scrooge! You know he is, Robert. Nobody knows it better than you do!

BOB CRATCHIT

My dear; Christmas Day.

MRS CRATCHIT

I'll drink his health for your sake and the day's - not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy New Year! He'll be very merry and happy, I have no doubt.

BOB CRATCHIT

Yes. Ahem. Mister Scrooge!

OMNES

Mister Scrooge!

And the Cratchits fade away.

A bleak hut in the distance; the last rays of an amber sun; an empty moor in front. Cold, and wind. But through the window of the hut: a light. And a single male voice raised in song.

[SONG BEGINS]

SCROOGE

What place is this?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

A place where miners live, who toil in the bowels of the earth. And yet they know me here.

And into the hut where THE MINER AND HIS FAMILY pick up the song, joining in the chorus, and then they disappear, and Scrooge and the Ghost are travelling once more to a rocky coast, where a lighthouse pulses.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

And on the coast they know me.

Inside the lighthouse, TWO LIGHT-HOUSE KEEPERS sing the second verse, then we move on again as

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

And on the seas they know me.

The creaking of the rigging and the ocean waves tell us that we're on a ship, and the HELMSMAN turns his wheel as he sings the final verse.

In each place, the ghost dispenses a drop or two of water onto the people as their song soars, bringing them together with their loved ones in spirit, even if they cannot be there in person.

[SONG ENDS]

Up on a man laughing; fitfully; uproariously. It's Fred, Scrooge's nephew, and his laugh could take on the world.

FRED

He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live! He believed it too!

At Fred's house are, among others, Fred's wife JANE, young bachelor TOPPER, and Fred's sister-in-law LILLIE. Topper flirts with Lillie in the background throughout.

JANE

More shame on him, Fred. More shame on him.

FRED

Oh, he's a comical old fellow, that's the truth. And not so pleasant as he might be. But those offences carry their own punishment, so I have nothing to say against him.

JANE

But isn't he very rich, Fred? At least you always tell me so.

FRED

What of it, my dear? All that money is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't even the satisfaction of thinking that he's ever going to benefit us with it!

JANE

I have no patience with him.

LILLIE

Nor I.

FRED

Oh, I have. I am sorry for him! I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Locked in his cold house, all alone at Christmas.

Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence?

JANE

He loses a good dinner, at the very least. What do you think, Topper?

Topper ceases making eyes across the table at Lillie for a moment to say:

TOPPER

As a bachelor I have nothing to say on the subject. I am but one of life's poor, wretched outcasts, and any meal would be a good one if it were hot and warm. Alas, that I should ever have a wife that I could be proud of and could treat right.

JANE

Oh, and where could you possibly find a girl like that, Topper? Especially on a cold Christmas night like tonight.

TOPPER

Perhaps some day, when fortune smiles upon my outcast bachelor lot.

JANE

Come, Fred, you were saying?

FRED

Well, the consequence of him taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us is, I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm.

TOPPER

Indeed it's so.

FRED

I am certain that he loses pleasanter companions that he can find in his own thoughts, or in his dusty old chambers. No, I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it - I defy him not to think better of it - if he finds me going there in good temper year after year, and saying Uncle Scrooge, how are you? Will you not join us?

JANE

I fear he will not.

Lillie nudges her.

JANE

Oh, yes, it's time for a game. Shall we play blind man's buff? Who shall be first?

TOPPER

Allow me.

Topper steps forth, and Fred puts the blindfold upon him. They play a short game, and perhaps not inexplicably, Topper always ends up finding Lillie.

Sometimes he manages this feat by Fred or Jane turning him around and pointing him in the right direction, sometimes by not-so-surreptitiously lifting up the blindfold and peeking, and at least once by her grabbing him by the hand and leading him directly to her. Over this, Scrooge speaks to the ghost.

SCROOGE

I never played such a game, as a child. What is the point of it? Your cares and worries are still there at the end, regardless of the result. There is no real winner or loser, and no real point or outcome.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

And yet they enjoy themselves.

SCROOGE

But why? There are no stakes, nothing to win or lose. May as well look at clouds all day, you'll gain as much.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Perhaps not.

SCROOGE

You seem older. What is happening? The lines on your face grow deeper with each passing minute.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I have not much time left on this earth. I am here for but a short while in each year, and it passes by the moment.

SCROOGE

The blind man's buff is over, I see. What's this new game?

It's twenty questions - and Fred is chuckling away as they play.

FRED

Come on then, what animal am I thinking of?

TOPPER

We know it's got two legs, and is alive, and is in London.

JANE

Is it disagreeable?

FRED

Most definitely. Savage sometimes.

TOPPER
And does it walk the streets?

FRED
Regularly.

LILLIE
Does it growl, or grunt?

FRED
That's two questions - but I'll give you the answer to both - yes, and yes. It's a terrible noise it makes.

LILLIE
Is it led around by a person?

FRED
Oh no, it would never be led anywhere. It's headstrong and angry.

TOPPER
Is it a cat?

JANE
Or a horse?

TOPPER
Or a bear?

FRED
No, no, and no. Oh, last question, you'll never guess.

LILLIE
I've got it! I've got it! It's your uncle Scrooge!

FRED
Oh yes! And so it is...

TOPPER
Oh, not fair! The man's a bear, is he not? I can't believe you'd cheat us like that, Fred...

FRED
Well, he's given us plenty of merriment tonight, and it would be impolite of us not to drink his health, although he not be here himself. Here's to Uncle Scrooge!

OMNES
Uncle Scrooge!

FRED
A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is. He wouldn't take it from me, but he may have it nonetheless. Uncle Scrooge!

And then they're gone.

Just Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present, alone in the dark.

SCROOGE

Most droll. Spirit - I see the grey in your hair, the weight on your back pressing you down.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

My time upon this globe is very brief.

SCROOGE

What is that?

There is something squirming in the Ghost's robe.

SCROOGE

Pray tell me - what is that?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Look here.

It unfolds its robe to reveal two frightened, miserable children. Feral, dressed in rags, scowling and wolfish.

SCROOGE

Children? I did not know that spirits could have children. Are they yours?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

No. They are man's - and they cling to me, appealing from their parents. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all their degree, for together they can destroy you.

SCROOGE

But how? They are but children.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Want and ignorance can grow unattended by man. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased! Unless they are assisted, they will grow worse, and larger with every passing year.

SCROOGE

Have they no refuge? Have they no resource?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?

SCROOGE

Get back. Get back!

And as the children ferally approach
Scrooge and he cowers back from them,
the spirit fades into the darkness and
the bells chime midnight.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Behind Scrooge another spectre appears, its features obscured by a dark cloak. The two children stop approaching Scrooge, and retreat from the apparition in fear.

Scrooge realises something is behind him, and slowly turns to face it...

SCROOGE

Are you...

The phantom says nothing.

SCROOGE

Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?

A hand emerges from the cloak, pointing onwards.

SCROOGE

You are to show me shadows of things that have not yet come to pass, but will happen in the time before us. Is that so, spirit?

An inclination of the head.

SCROOGE

I fear you. I am man enough to admit that. But I hope to be another man from what I was, and will bear you company with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?

Nothing.

SCROOGE

Lead on. Lead on! The night is almost done, and its time is precious to me.

And then they are suddenly in the heart of the city with three CITY BANKERS.

FIRST BANKER

Do you know more than that?

SECOND BANKER

No. I don't know much about it either way. Only that he's dead.

THIRD BANKER

When did he die?

FIRST BANKER

Last night, I believe.

THIRD BANKER

But what did he do with his money? That's the most important thing.

SECOND BANKER

I haven't heard. Left it to his Company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to me, that's for sure.

FIRST BANKER

And what would be the chance of that happening. Slim to none, I'd have thought.

SECOND BANKER

As likely as he left it to anyone else, I believe! I expect it to be a very cheap funeral, though, for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it.

THIRD BANKER

Suppose we make up a party and volunteer? It would be a shame for a man to go in the ground with no-one there to see him off.

FIRST BANKER

I don't mind going if a lunch is provided. But I must be fed if I go.

SECOND BANKER

I never eat lunch, and black is not my colour. But I'll offer to go if anybody else will. For when I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak wherever we met.

THIRD BANKER

Then you may likely have been his best friend in the world, to have a civil conversation.

SECOND BANKER

Still! We must move on. I have business to attend to.

The men walk on.

SCROOGE

I know those coves. Men of business all. We traded together many a time, and they did as well by me as I did by them. Will you not tell me why you brought us to hear them?

A shop appears around them, an old man, OLD JOE, sitting within. Through the door comes a woman with a heavy bundle, the CHARWOMAN. Behind her enters the LAUNDRESS, followed a moment later by the UNDERTAKER'S MAN, each holding a similar bundle.

A moment as they all look at each other, then the Charwoman bursts out laughing and the others follow suit.

CHARWOMAN

Look here, Old Joe, now here's a chance! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it. Charwoman, Laundress, and Undertaker's man, one after the other, like as we'd queued for entry!

OLD JOE

You couldn't have met in a better place, now, could you. Come into the parlour. You were made free of it long ago, you know, and the other two ain't strangers. Stop still while I shut the door of the shop, wouldn't do to have people we don't know in. Come into the parlour, now, come into the parlour.

CHARWOMAN

What odds that we should meet here, then, eh? What odds?

LAUNDRESS

Every person has a right to take care of themselves. He always did.

CHARWOMAN

Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman? Who's the wiser but us, and we won't tell. Not like we should pick holes in each other's coats, is it?

UNDERTAKER'S MAN

No indeed.

LAUNDRESS

I should hope not.

CHARWOMAN

Very well then! Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these. Not a dead man.

LAUNDRESS

No-one can blame us for taking them.

CHARWOMAN

If he'd wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, why wasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.

LAUNDRESS

It's the truest word that ever was spoke. Us taking these things, it's a judgement on him, that's what it is.

CHARWOMAN

I wish it was a little heavier one. And it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else.

LAUNDRESS

Who's to be first then?

CHARWOMAN

Open up that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain, I'm not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We knew pretty well that we were helping ourselves before we met here, I believe. It's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe.

UNDERTAKER'S MAN

Nay, you must let me be first.

He hands over his bundle to Joe who goes through and tots it up.

OLD JOE

A seal, a pencil case, a pair of buttons. A brooch here, and let's have a proper look at that. No, there ain't no great value here. Ten and three, and not a sixpence more.

As the Laundress goes through her bundle.

OLD JOE

Sheets, and towels, wear still in 'em. Two old silver teaspoons, and a pair of sugar-tongs, those'll go. And boots, solid and warm. Fifteen and ninepence, and I'm being too generous because you're a lady. It's a weakness of mine, and that's the way I ruin myself.

CHARWOMAN

And now undo my bundle, Joe. See what's inside.

OLD JOE

What do you call this then? Bed-curtains?

CHARWOMAN

Bed-curtains! Fine and thick, an worth something I should say.

OLD JOE

You mean to say you took 'em down, rings and all, with him still lying there?

CHARWOMAN

Yes I do. Why not? Not like he would move to stop me.

OLD JOE

You were born to make your fortune, and you'll certainly do it.

CHARWOMAN

I certainly sha'n't hold my hand when I get something in it by reaching out. Not for the sake of such a man as he was, I promise you that. Now here's the blankets.

OLD JOE

His blankets too?

CHARWOMAN

Now who else's, do you think? He isn't likely to get cold without 'em, I dare say.

OLD JOE

I hope he didn't die of anything catching, eh?

CHARWOMAN

Don't you be afraid of that. I wasn't so fond of his company that I'd loiter about him for such things if he did. Ah! You may look through that shirt till your eyes ache, but you won't find a hole in it. Not a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it, if it wasn't for me.

OLD JOE

What do you call wasting of it?

CHARWOMAN

Why, a putting it on him to be buried in. Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico ain't good enough for such a purpose, it isn't good enough for anything. And he can't look uglier in it than he did in that one.

OLD JOE

A fine collection from you, and here's a fine collection from me. Fifteen and ninepence, and worth the lot.

CHARWOMAN

Ha. He frightened us all away from him when he was alive, but see he ain't paid us all out in death.

SCROOGE

Who was that man? Am I like him? Is that your message, spirit? Is he the same the businessmen spoke of? I beg you, tell me why you show me this.

The scene changes again. A bed is in the middle of the room, and on it, a calico sheet over the body of a man.

SCROOGE

Is this the man they spoke of? Why have you brought me here?

The phantom's hand points to the corpse. Outside the room, the wind sighs. And a sound of gnawing.

SCROOGE

Will no-one tend to him in his death? Does no-one care for him? What do you want me to do? No, I sha'n't look. I daren't. Spirit, what is that sound?

(realising)

Rats? Will no-one come and move him elsewhere? To be eaten by rats... This is a terrible place, a fearful place, I have learned my lesson, please, let us go from here!

But the spirit doesn't move. Just continues to point at the corpse. And the sound of gnawing and squeaking continues.

SCROOGE

No, I don't want to look. I can't look! I would do it if I could. But I have not the power, spirit. I have not the power! Please, take me from this place, take me elsewhere! Someone must care about this man's life and death - I cannot believe that no-one is affected by it. Show me, spirit, please! Before, I would have demanded. Now I beg you!

The scene changes to a small house. CAROLINE is here, sitting by the fire. She's obviously waiting for someone to come home. She checks the clock. Tries to do some needlework but can't concentrate. Checks the clock again.

Finally, a knock at the door as CAROLINE'S HUSBAND comes home.

SCROOGE

I know him. I helped him the other day. He needed help and I gave it. You see, spirit, there is hope for me yet. I am a better man than Jacob was - than I was. At least, I can be, if you let me try.

CAROLINE

What news? Is it good or bad?

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

Bad. The ship is delayed; we have nothing to pay.

CAROLINE

Then we are ruined.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

No. There is hope yet.

CAROLINE

He has relented? If such a miracle has occurred then nothing is past hope.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

He is past relenting. He is dead.

CAROLINE

Oh thank God! I didn't mean it. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

Here, hush. The woman that I told you about, who sent me away when I tried to see him? It was true. He truly was ill, not just avoiding my call. Not just ill, but dying, even then.

CAROLINE

He died last night?

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

Yes.

CAROLINE

But what of our debt to him? To whom will our debt be transferred?

CAROLINE'S HUSBAND

I don't know. But it doesn't matter; before that time we shall be ready with the money. And even if we were not, it would be bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep tonight with light hearts, Caroline!

SCROOGE

Pleasure... They could only find pleasure in his death. Their burdens lightened by that man's decease. Why must you show me this? I helped them, when no other would! And they would surely have starved had I not. Why will you not say something!

The ghost leads the way, and they step into the Cratchits' house.

The young boy and girl are sitting quietly in a corner, while Peter reads a bible and Mrs Cratchit sews; black mourning clothes.

The observant may notice Tim's crutch, leaning up against the fireplace.

PETER

And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

He stops. Mrs Cratchit stops sewing.

MRS CRATCHIT

Ah, my eyes. The colour hurts them. It makes them weak to be sewing by candlelight; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, not for the world. It must be near his time.

PETER

Past it, rather. But I think he's walked a little slower than he used, these last few evenings.

MRS CRATCHIT

I have known him walk with - I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed.

BOB CRATCHIT

I'm fine. I am fine. I saw Mister Scrooge's nephew, Fred, on the way back. He stopped when he saw me, and said he thought as how I looked a little down, and inquired what had happened to distress me. And he said that he was heartily sorry for us all, and gave me his card. It really seemed as if he felt for us.

MRS CRATCHIT

I'm sure he's a good soul.

BOB CRATCHIT

He asked after Peter, too. I shouldn't be at all surprised if he was able to get Peter a better situation.

MRS CRATCHIT

Hear that, Peter.

YOUNG GIRL

And then he'll probably get himself a girlfriend.

YOUNG BOY

Ewwww.

PETER

Get along with you.

BOB CRATCHIT

It's as likely as not, one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that in the future. And you shall all leave your mother and I in the end, and find a place of your own. But whenever we part from each other, however and whenever that may be, we must none of us forget poor Tim, and this first parting.

And the Cratchits, and the house fade away...

Darkness... Just Scrooge and the Ghost.

SCROOGE

Is this it? Is our parting moment at hand? Will you not show me what will become of me in the future? I intend to be a better man, to see myself improved. I am improved. Let me behold what I shall be in days to come. Show me how I have changed! Show me how my life will be!

The Ghost and Scrooge are in front of Scrooge's office. Scrooge pauses at the door; but the Ghost moves on.

SCROOGE

This is my office. Why do you point away?

He peers through the window.

SCROOGE

Why am I not there... There's someone else in my place.
Where am I? Spirit, where am I?

A churchyard. Iron gates. Wind.

The spirit reaches a grave and points
down to it.

SCROOGE

A question. Before I draw nearer to that grave. Before I
see more, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of
the things that will be, or are they only the shadows of
things that may be? I know that men's courses foreshadow
their ends. If men do not change, those ends will come. But
if the courses be departed from, the ends will change.
Spirit, say it is thus with what you show me. Spirit, I beg
you. Before I see, let me know that I can change this!

Scrooge steps slowly towards the grave.
It shimmers out of the darkness, the
name on it becoming clear: EBENEZER
SCROOGE.

SCROOGE

No. No. Spirit, hear me! I am not the man I was. I will
not be the man I would have been. I have changed. I am
changed. Why would you show me this, if I am past hope?
Spirit, assure me that I can change these shadows, save
myself and others! O, I shall honour Christmas in the past,
present, and future. Tell me spirit, let me wash away the
writing on this stone! Please, I will not shut out these
lessons, tell me that I can change these shadows as I change
myself. Don't let me die like this!

And the spirit wails and approaches
him, and the thunder crashes and
Scrooge cowers, and the lights go out.

And when they come up again, Scrooge
awakens in his own bed.

SCROOGE

Yes. Oh yes. Yes! My bed, my house, my world! Heaven and
Christmas be praised, the bed-curtains are not torn down,
they are here! I am here... The shadows of the things that
would have been will change. I shall make them change.
Merry Christmas to everyone! Happy New Year to the world!
Oh, I am reborn!

And the bells of the churches ring out,
calling people to Christmas service.

SCROOGE

Christmas service?

He runs to the door and slams it open;
a beautiful day. A BOY walks past.

SCROOGE
You there! Boy! What's today?

BOY
Eh?

SCROOGE
What's today, my fine fellow?

BOY
Why it's Christmas Day!

SCROOGE
Christmas Day! I haven't missed it, then! It hasn't
happened yet! The spirits have taken me back, and I have my
chance again!

BOY
Eh?

SCROOGE
Eh, young lad! Eh indeed! A new start for us all, a new
world to live in. You know the poulterer's in the next
street but one, at the corner?

BOY
I should hope I did. I ain't a blind beggar yet.

SCROOGE
Remarkable boy! Intelligent lad! You have a promising
career ahead of you, I have no doubt. And have they sold the
prize turkey that was hanging in the window? Not the smaller
one, but the larger?

BOY
The one as big as me?

SCROOGE
That's the one!

BOY
It's hanging there now.

SCROOGE
Most excellent. Go and buy it, my lad!

BOY
Ha! Right.

SCROOGE
I assure you, I am in earnest! Come back with the man, and I
shall give you a shilling.

BOY

You're serious?

SCROOGE

Come back with him in less than five minutes and I shall give you half a crown!

BOY

You sha'n't see me for dust!

And the boy bolts for the poulterer's.

SCROOGE

I shall send it to Bob Cratchit for his Christmas meal - why it's twice the size of Tiny Tim. What a joke that shall be!

Scrooge sees someone across the road...
Squab. Scrooge runs over to him.

SCROOGE

My dear sir! You came by the other day to my office... Please, I beg you enter my house for but a moment! I have a matter of some urgency to discuss.

They cross back into the house.

SCROOGE

Here, here, how do you do? I hope you succeeded in your quest to raise money. It was most kind of you, most kind. A merry Christmas to you!

SQUAB

Merry Christmas, Mister Scrooge, is it not?

SCROOGE

Yes, yes, that is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Please, allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness to let me contribute to your funds. Allow me to write you a cheque here and now, it will not take a moment.

He does so even as he speaks, and hands it over.

SQUAB

Lord bless me! My dear Mister Scrooge, are you serious?

SCROOGE

If you please. Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. And you must return next year, and the year after that.

SQUAB

My dear sir... I don't know what to say to such generosity! Many in this city will have a better holiday thanks to you.

SCROOGE

Please - don't say anything, please. But promise me that you will come and see me again next year at this time.

SQUAB

Thank you.

SCROOGE

Thank'ee. I am much obliged to you. And a merry Christmas! Oh, such a day, such a night. Christmas! To think that I denied it for so long.

Scrooge closes the door again.

SCROOGE

My family! I must see Fred, and his wife, and...

He coughs... Then breaks out into a fit of coughing until it seems almost that he will die from it... And then he coughs something up into his hand.

And holds it to the light.

It's a toothpick.

SCROOGE

A toothpick...

And Scrooge begins to laugh, and laugh, until he breaks down in tears.

Lights down.

Then up again on Scrooge's home, later, as Bob arrives.

BOB CRATCHIT

Mister Scrooge, sir, I think there has been some kind of mistake. A huge turkey was delivered to my house in your name. I came at once to correct the error before it was docked from my salary.

SCROOGE

Last night, Mister Cratchit, I dreamed for a while that I had a revelation, that I had been visited by spirits who wished for me to change. But now I know better. I finally realise the sort of person that I am, and am determined to be who I am to the full... Mister Cratchit, the turkey is for your Christmas feast.

BOB CRATCHIT

Are you all right?

SCROOGE

At long last I believe I am. A merry Christmas to you, Bob! A merrier Christmas, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I shall raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your family howsoe'er I may. I shall live in past, present, and future, and let the world into my life for good.

BOB CRATCHIT

That's lovely sir. Are you sure I can't fetch you something? Or a doctor, perhaps?

SCROOGE

Dear Bob, I am better than I have been for many a year. Tomorrow we shall discuss your affairs over a bowl of mulled wine! And we must talk about your youngest - he shall have the finest care that money can provide. Tiny Tim will NOT die. All sorts of things shall change, Bob. All sorts of things.

BOB CRATCHIT

Will you join us, sir, for Christmas dinner?

SCROOGE

Thank you, thank you for your kindness, but I cannot. There is one more thing I must attend to.

Lights down, then up again in Fred's house.

Lillie sits on Topper's lap, and blessed if the two of them aren't necking. Jane and Fred are bustling around them, tidying.

JANE

Come on you two. Dinner's almost ready.

FRED

How shall we pass the time?

TOPPER

I can think of a few things.

LILLIE

A song?

TOPPER

Of course.

As the four of them SING A FINAL CAROL, on the other side of the door, Scrooge paces. He passes the door, tries to go up for it. Can't.

Until finally he makes a dash for it and knocks.

FRED

Well bless my soul. Who's that?

SCROOGE

It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to see you at last, at long last. Will you let me in, Fred?

FRED

Of course, come in, come in! This is Topper, and my wife's sister Lillie - they are engaged you know, just today!

JANE

So good to see you again.

SCROOGE

Jane - niece now!

JANE

For a ten of years.

SCROOGE

And it has taken me so long to come by. For which I am truly sorry. Topper, Lillie, such a pleasure to see you at Christmas-time. And may I offer my heartfelt congratulations on your betrothal. I trust that you will both be very happy together.

FRED

This is a marvellous surprise, uncle! After our last conversation, I feared that you may never take up my invitation.

SCROOGE

I was not sure that you meant it. I thought perhaps you only wished to be kind.

FRED

Uncle. I meant every word. And still do.

SCROOGE

The smallest things as well as the largest can bring a man to his senses, nephew. And I am determined - yes, determined - that I shall keep Christmas as well as any man, if any man knows how.

FRED

You seem different from when I saw you last. In point of fact, I cannot recollect that I have ever seen you as happy.

SCROOGE

A man can change, Fred, if he so desires. And I shall be such a man. As good a friend, as good a man as this city knows. Or any other city, town or borough, come to that!

FRED

Uncle, what's got into you?

SCROOGE

The true spirit of Christmas! And it took long enough. Thank you, Fred, for trying so long. And God bless all of you for letting me in to your lives. It has been so long since I lived fully in past, present, or future. Perhaps I never did, before now.

JANE

Well it's lovely to see you at last. And here; dinner is ready for us all.

FRED

Whatever has brought you here, I am glad to see you, uncle. God bless you.

SCROOGE

And God bless you, Fred. God bless everyone at Christmas-time, a season for joy, and laughter, and family, and friends. A time for each one of us to live, truly live, in the past, present, and future. God bless you. God bless us every one!

END OF ACT TWO

CURTAIN